

## **Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements and the Education Quality Standards**

*Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirement (PBGR) guidance is grounded in Vermont's Education Quality Standards (EQS), which can be found [here](#). EQS policy related to PBGR development and implementation can be found in sections 2120.5, and 2120.7-8.*

### **What does EQS require in the way of PBGR development and implementation?**

EQS (section 2120.5) requires that all schools assess each student's proficiency across seven content areas as a part of determining their readiness to graduate. Those content areas are: literacy, mathematical content and practices, scientific inquiry and content knowledge, global citizenship, physical education and health education, and artistic expression. EQS also requires that student proficiency against a set of content-neutral transferable skills be assessed as a part of this process. The EQS-identified transferable skills are: communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, inquiry, problem solving, and the use of technology.

As a part of describing this requirement, EQS states that schools "shall enable students to engage annually in rigorous, relevant and comprehensive learning opportunities that allows them to demonstrate proficiency" in each of the categories above. Any PBGRs that schools adopt must meet this rigorous, relevant and comprehensive bar. It is not enough, for example, for a school to assess student proficiency in only one learning standard per content area, or to assess proficiency on each transferable skill using only one performance assessment.

A sample set of PBGRs is available on the PBGR page of the AOE website. These samples were collaboratively developed by the AOE, a group of Vermont teachers representing EQS-identified content areas, and staff from the Great Schools Partnership in Portland, ME. These samples provide an example of rigorous, relevant, and comprehensive PBGRs, and are available for schools to adopt as they are, or to customize as they see fit. Without identifying a strict definition for "rigorous, relevant and comprehensive", these samples incorporate essential learning standards associated with each academic content area, and would require schools to assess student proficiency against each EQS-identified content area and transferable skill in multiple ways, as a condition of determining student proficiency.

### **When do EQS PBGR requirements take effect?**

EQS (section 2120.7) states that students graduating in 2020 (students entering 7<sup>th</sup> grade in 2014-15) will be the first class graduating under a proficiency-based system. It is recommended that schools develop and adopt PBGRs over the 2014-15 school year to best prepare for this 2020 milestone.

### **Do PBGRs replace our other local graduation requirements for students?**

Under EQS section 2120.7, PBGRs do not need to replace existing local graduation requirements, and can complement or supplement other local graduation requirements, if desired. However, beginning with the anticipated graduating class of 2020, demonstration of proficiency is the sole means for determining progress and graduation. Section 2020.8 states that while credits may be used to record the satisfaction of graduation requirements, “credits must specify the proficiencies demonstrated in order to attain a credit and shall not be based on time spent in learning”.

### **Where do the learning standards in PBGRs come from?**

The EQS PBGR requirement establishes no new learning standards for students outside of those that are already in the Vermont Framework of Standards. PBGR learning standards should be entirely drawn from this existing Framework. PBGRs are not about requiring new standards—they are about ensuring that our existing standards are taught and assessed with student proficiency in mind.

### **If we have a student who meets their PBGRs prior to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, can that student graduate?**

It is entirely possible that a student could graduate “early” in a proficiency-based model, in the same way that it is possible for students to graduate prior to 12<sup>th</sup> grade under existing sets of local graduation requirements. Ultimately, a student’s readiness to graduate may not be determined by PBGRs alone, and will more likely be determined by a combination of locally adopted PBGRs, and other local graduation requirements adopted in accordance with state law.

### **What if a student needs more than four years to meet graduation requirements?**

One purpose of a proficiency-based approach is to make demonstrated proficiency against the standards the constant, and time the variable. While four-year models will likely continue to be the norm, some students will benefit from a longer time in school. That should not be seen as a negative outcome, and it does not have a negative impact on graduation rate unless the student requires more than six years from 9<sup>th</sup> grade entry in order to successfully complete.

### **Who is responsible for developing and adopting PBGRs?**

Secondary school boards are responsible, under EQS (section 2120.8) for adopting PBGRs for their high schools. Their PBGRs can be adopted from the AOE model, or can be developed locally using any means at the school’s disposal (internal teams at the high school or SU level, external coaches or consultants, etc.).

While schools have considerable freedom in determining how their local-level PBGRs are constructed, it is highly recommended that they be developed with middle school representation in the process, and with joint middle and high school implementation in mind. This is recommended because of the strong presence of PBGRs in Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), which are defined by Act 77 as documents framing 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade learning opportunities.

### **How will the AOE monitor our PBGRs and PBGR implementation?**

The AOE will likely review PBGR development and implementation through its monitoring of PLPs, which track, to some degree, student progress toward meeting PBGRs. School boards responsible for PBGR adoption will also be asked to provide assurance that they are in compliance with this EQS expectation.

### **Is our school required to adopt the AOE's sample PBGR guidance?**

Schools are not required to adopt the AOE's sample PBGRs. The AOE's guidance and sample documents are being presented as EQS-compliant examples of PBGRs. Schools and local boards are welcome to adopt them as they are, or can modify them to better reflect their institutional structures and the needs of their staff/students. Schools can also develop their own PBGRs, provided that they meet EQS requirements.

### **Our school has been developing PBGRs for years. Will we need to start over now?**

Schools that are currently engaged in (or that have recently completed) local-level PBGR development are not required to start over, or to throw that work out. But they will be required to revise those PBGRs, as necessary, to meet the requirements of EQS. Specifically, all locally-developed PBGRs need to measure student proficiency against the seven curriculum content areas and transferable skills described above, and need to do this in a way that is rigorous, relevant and comprehensive with respect to the Vermont Framework of Standards.

### **What is the elementary and middle school connection to PBGRs?**

While EQS frames PBGRs in the context of high school graduation, the AOE also sees PBGRs as being a part of a larger effort to support proficiency-based learning across the K-12 continuum. Because of this, AOE-provided PBGR guidance includes elementary and middle school learning progression milestones. While these elementary and middle school milestones aren't EQS-required, and don't perform the summative function of high school graduation requirements, they could still serve as important benchmarks for assessing student proficiency on the path to graduation. They could also help to frame Supervisory Union (SU) and District-level efforts to systematize Proficiency-Based Learning (PBL) models SU or District-wide.

### **What support for PBGR development and implementation will the AOE provide?**

The AOE is developing and providing numerous resources through the PBGR pages of its website: [education.vermont.gov](http://education.vermont.gov). These resources will grow throughout the 2014-15 school year, in particular, and will include staff development tools, guidelines for local-level PBGR development, and resources that schools can use when discussing PBGRs with parents and community members.

We also realize that many schools in Vermont are currently engaged in this work, and that we have a lot to learn from each other, statewide, as colleagues. To further this information-sharing, the AOE will link, through the PBGR pages of the Agency website, to PBGR and PBL resources that have been developed by Vermont schools. The Agency hopes that this will enable Vermont schools to identify and reach out to each other for support, and that we may all be able to develop a better collective understanding of PBL models in the process.

Finally, we realize that PBGRs are only one element of effective PBL models, and that our real work is less about developing and adopting local-level PBGRs, and more about defining and supporting the shift in teaching and assessment that effective PBL models will require. To this end, the AOE is planning on supporting PBL implementation through multiple channels, including site support (through AOE School Effectiveness and its collaborative partners), grant opportunities, and through remote and asynchronous channels (webinars, video tutorials, etc.). More information about these supports will be released, online and through the AOE Weekly Field Memo, as they become available.

### **Where do I go if I have any PBGR questions?**

If you have any question about the AOE's PBGR initiative or related resources, please contact Tom Alderman, Director, Secondary and Adult Division, at [tom.alderman@state.vt.us](mailto:tom.alderman@state.vt.us).